

Dear Mr. Greenwood:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public hearing in West Memphis, Arkansas, on August 20, 2002. In your statement you discussed your board's outstanding maintenance awards for the mainline levee work and also provided an update on six seepage control projects in the Memphis District area which included one under construction at Hillhouse I and five others under investigation at Hillhouse II, Austin, Trotters I and II, and Farrell, Mississippi. In regard to the Vicksburg District area, you discussed progress on the Upper Yazoo Basin project, projects under the Continuing Authorities Program (CAP), funding for reservoir maintenance and management, and mitigation land for the Big Sunflower and Upper Yazoo Basin projects.

The Commission congratulates you on the many outstanding levee maintenance awards that your levee board has received over the years and recognizes the hard work and dedication that you and your staff have exhibited.

We appreciate the cooperation that the levee board has provided the Memphis District with the seepage control items mentioned above and with other flood control projects in your area. The currently scheduled award dates for the seepage control items are as follows: Austin, February 2003; Trotters I, March 2003; Hillhouse II, August 2003; Trotters II, September 2005; and Farrell, September 2005.

The Commission commends the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board on its flood control efforts in the Yazoo River Basin. Your sponsorship of the Upper Yazoo projects (UYP) has helped the project move progressively up the Yazoo River. Our construction contractor on channel Item 5A is making good progress and is ahead of schedule. The construction contract for the channel Item 5B was awarded September 27, 2002, and we expect the notice to proceed this month. There has been a minor delay with awarding the structures Item 7. The problem is now being reviewed and we plan to resolve it within the next 30 days. As the project makes its way above Greenwood on the Tallahatchie River, we look forward to continuing an ongoing relationship with the levee board to make this project a success.

The Commission acknowledges the needed funds for the UYP and appreciates the levee board's help in securing these needed funds. We commit our continued support for this very worthwhile project in working with the levee board and the Congress to vigorously fund the UYP to its full capability.

The Vicksburg District will continue to work with Tunica, Tallahatchie, and Sunflower Counties and the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board on the CAP projects mentioned in your remarks. They will be initiated in Fiscal Year 2003, subject to the availability of funds.

With regard to maintenance funding for the Yazoo Basin Reservoirs, minimal budget requirements are funded each year to perform the essential annual operation and maintenance activities for the flood damage reduction function. Funding shortfalls at these four lakes for other functions--natural resources stewardship, outdoor recreation management, and environmental compliance--exist to varying degrees each year. Likewise, there is a funding shortfall associated with backlog maintenance that continues to grow at about 6 percent annually. Currently, the shortfall for all functions performed at the four lakes is slightly less than \$100 million. The Mississippi River Commission and the Vicksburg District are cognizant of this fact and the associated implications.

The Vicksburg District has purchased 3,500 acres of mitigation land in the Sky Lake area. This mitigation is for both the Upper Yazoo and Upper Steele Bayou projects. The State of Mississippi had previously purchased a portion of the Sky Lake area that contained large cypress trees. Once the Vicksburg District has established trees on this area, it will be turned over to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks for management.

Mitigation requirements on the UYP and Big Sunflower River Maintenance projects are presently concurrent with construction. The Commission appreciates your board's efforts over the years in securing mitigation tracts on all the Yazoo Basin projects.

The Vicksburg District has completed a Real Estate Design Memorandum on approximately 1,600 acres in Bolivar County that has been offered to us by your board. The Corps plans to make an offer on this property this fall. This mitigation land, when reforested, will be used to offset environmental losses from the construction of the Mississippi River Levees (MRL) project since our current mitigation needs are for the MRL.

The Corps will review and assess whether or not lands proposed for a mitigation bank site are appropriate in accordance with current policy and regulation. Lands already protected under Federal programs, such as the Wetland Reserve Program, are generally not appropriate for mitigation and will not be given any credit in a mitigation bank.

Thank you again for your comments during our hearing. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission